

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1982

AF/W FOR KIRKPATRICK FROM CHARGE

AID/W FOR COTONOU AIDOFF SINGER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, DM
SUBJ: BENINESE CONCERN OVER DELAYS IN BRIDGE PROJECT

REF: COTONOU 1947

SUMMARY: PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) HAS EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER DELAYS IN COTONOU BRIDGE PROJECT AND WANTS IMMEDIATE EVIDENCE OF VISIBLE ACTIVITY ON BRIDGE SITE. MAIN DIFFICULTY IS TIMELY PROCUREMENT OF HEAVY MACHINERY SINCE TIME BETWEEN ISSUANCE LETTER OF CREDIT, ORDERING EQUIPMENT AND ARRIVAL IN COUNTRY LIKELY TO BE SEVERAL MONTHS. POSSIBILITY EXISTS NELLO-TEER OBTAINING MACHINERY FROM MORRISON-KNUDSEN BUT SUCH PROCUREMENT LIMITED BY PROBLEMS DESCRIBED BELOW. REQUEST CONFIRMATION ESTABLISHMENT OF LETTER OF CREDIT SO THAT WE WILL BE ON SOLID GROUND IN FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GPRB. END SUMMARY.

1. FOREIGN MINISTER DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR AMERICAN AFFAIRS GNOLONFON CALLED ME IN DEC. 15 TO EXPRESS GPRB "DOUBTS" ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS ON COTONOU BRIDGE PROJECT. GNOLONFON SAID THAT GPRB HAD ENCOUNTERED SO MANY DELAYS IN OPENING LETTER OF CREDIT AND SIMILAR MATTERS THAT IT NOW WONDERED WHETHER THE U.S. WAS PLAYING "GAME" WITH BENIN. HE SAID THAT U.S. APPARENTLY UNAWARE OF GREAT EFFORT MADE BY GOVERNMENT TO GET PROJECT MOVING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SINCE NOT
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ONLY IS BRIDGE ESSENTIAL TO SOLVING MAJOR TRAFFIC PROBLEM,

BUT IS TANGIBLE SIGN OF NORMALIZATION OF U.S.-BENIN RELATIONS. GNONLONFOUN SAID THAT GOVERNMENT WAS PARTICULARLY UPSET BY NEWS THAT NELLO TEER (N-T) COULD NOT GET NECESSARY HEAVY EQUIPMENT TO BENIN BEFORE THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. GPRB ORIGINALLY HAD WANTED EVIDENCE OF ACTIVITY ON SITE PRIOR TO NOV. 30 NATIONAL DAY AND NOW FEELS THAT AT MINIMUM WORK SHOULD BEGIN BEFORE END OF YEAR.

2. I CAREFULLY EXPLAINED TO GNONLONFOUN STEPS NECESSARY BEFORE LETTER OF CREDIT COULD BE OPENED, DESCRIBED PROBLEM WITH BANK (REFTEL) AND NOTED THAT NELLO TEER VP FREDERICK HAD PERSONALLY CARRIED GPRB'S DETAILED REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHING LETTER OF CREDIT TO U.S. ON DEC 9. FURTHERMORE, I TOLD GNONLONFOUN THAT NO "GAME" WAS BEING PLAYED AND THAT ON THE CONTRARY IT WAS IN EVERYBODY'S INTEREST, ESPECIALLY THE CONTRACTORS, TO GET THE PROJECT UNDERWAY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO AVOID LOSING MONEY. I ADDED THAT I WAS SURPRISED GPRB WAS INTERPRETING BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS AS CALCULATED ACTIONS, AND SAID THAT I EXPECTED LETTER OF CREDIT WOULD BE OPENED THIS WEEK, IF IT HAD NOT ALREADY BEEN DONE.

3. AS FOR QUESTION OF PROCUREMENT OF MACHINERY, I NOTED THAT PROCUREMENT IN ANY PROJECT WAS LENGTHY PROCESS AND NORMALLY INVOLVED LAG TIME RANGING FROM WEEKS TO MONTHS BETWEEN MOMENT ORDER PLACED AND EQUIPMENT RECEIVED. I SAID THAT NELLO TEER FELT IT COULD SPEED UP THE PROJECT GREATLY IF IT COULD BUY HEAVY MACHINERY CURRENTLY IN COUNTRY BELONGING TO MORRISON-KNUDSEN FOR MALANVILLE ROAD PROJECT, AND ASKED GNONLONFOUN WHETHER IF AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED BETWEEN TEER AND M-K, GPRB WOULD ERECT NO OBSTACLES TO THE TRANSACTION. GNONLONFOUN REPLIED THAT ON THE CONTRARY, GPRB DID NOT CARE WHERE EQUIPMENT WAS PURCHASED AND IF TECHNICAL OBSTACLES SUCH AS TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS AROSE, GPRB WOULD INTERVENE TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT TRAIN SPACE OR OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORT WOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE. I THANKED HIM FOR HIS ASSURANCES AND REPLIED THAT I WOULD DO WHAT I COULD TO INSURE THAT LETTER OF CREDIT HAD INDEED BEEN ESTABLISHED.

4. IN MEETING WITH NELLO TEER REPS LATER IN MORNING, N-T BUSINESS MANAGER KOFF REPORTED THAT M-K REPRESENTATIVE MAX CONFIDENTIAL

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HAD BEEN TOLD BY MINISTER OF EQUIPMENT RODRIGUEZ THAT ONLY THE GPRB COULD ACQUIRE M-K'S EQUIPMENT SINCE THE GOV'T PLANNED TO USE IT FOR A HEAVY EQUIPMENT TRAINING PROGRAM. RODRIGUEZ REPORTEDLY SAID THAT NO FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTION WOULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE JAN. 10 WHEN MAX RETURNS FROM LEAVE IN THE U.S.

5. BEFORE PROCEEDING FURTHER WITH GPRB, REQUEST THAT DEPARTMENT

CONTACT NELLO TEER AND CONTINENTAL BANK OF CHICAGO TO INSURE
THAT LETTER OF CREDIT HAS INDEED BEEN ESTABLISHED, SINCE GPRB
HAS LEGITIMATE GROUNDS FOR COMPLAINT ON DELAYS INVOLVED. ON
MATTER OF PROCUREMENT OF EQUIPMENT, I PROPOSE WAIT UNTIL
GNONLONFOUN REPORTS BACK TO HIS SUPERIORS. HE OBVIOUSLY
UNAWARE OF RODRIGUEZ'S INTEREST IN ACQUIRING EQUIPMENT,
ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF HIS PROMISE TO FACILITATE ACQUISITION
OF NECESSARY MACHINERY. I CAN RAISE ISSUE WITH HIM WHEN I
CAN CONFIRM THAT LETTER OF CREDIT HAS BEEN OPENED.
THOMPSON

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